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THE ROUND TABLE

THE CORRELATION OF ENGLISH IN COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL

When I was a college Senior, I listened to a course of lectures on prose fiction, subsequently embodied in a well-known manual on that subject. One of the most widely used textbooks on the teaching of high-school English draws largely from that book and recommends its use with high-school Seniors. One of the authors of a recent book entitled *The Writing of English* tells me that it has been adopted by many high schools for the use of high-school Freshmen and by many colleges for the use of college Freshmen. The author of *Sentence and Theme* says the same thing about his book. *Century Readings in English Literature* is used by many classes of high-school Juniors and by many classes of college Sophomores. The same thing is true of *English Prose and Poetry* and of *Twelve Centuries of English Literature*. Some college students think of these books in a singularly restricted way. The manual of selections from English literature is regarded as a complete embodiment of that subject, just as another brown book is "botany" and still another "physics"—all the botany there is, all the physics there is, all the English literature there is. Still others view the reappearance in college of the book of selections from English literature used in high school with something like frenzy. "Well said, old mole! Canst work i' the ground so fast?"

An examination of a number of English curricula in colleges and high schools seems to indicate that high-school Freshmen and college Freshmen, high-school Juniors and college Sophomores, high-school Seniors and college Seniors, are given in each case the same courses. There are even those who believe that high-school teachers sometimes use their college notebooks and present to their pupils the same materials which were presented to them in their college courses.

I will not say that this condition of things indicates confusion, but I will say that it is confusing to me, that it is important, if actually existent, and that it should be set in order. After fifteen years of only casual acquaintance with the interrelation of high-school English and college English, I return to the problem and find it obscure, more obscure,

it seems to me, than it was fifteen years ago. Naturally I am modest about assertion, but I wish to raise the question.

The generally received conception of the high school as the people's college with the consequent demand for absolute freedom in the making of its course of study has perhaps caused the high schools to disregard the colleges and those of their graduates who are going to college. Whether or not they are justifiable in disregarding so large and so important a group of their graduates, it is not for me to say; but I think that if the high schools will not get out of the way of the colleges, the colleges had better get out of the way of the high schools. I think that the interests of college students demand it.

Another observation, in which again I may be entirely mistaken, is also worth recording in this connection. When I returned from the army, my upperclass courses were all in the hands of others, but the noble institution I was connected with took me back at some sacrifice to itself and employed me to teach Freshmen. Those Freshmen were, in my judgment, altogether better prepared—wrote better, read better, knew more about English literature—than the Freshmen I had taught fifteen years before. And when you stop to think of it, why shouldn't they? They study less mathematics, less Latin, and no Greek at all. English occupies a relatively much more important place in the course of study in the high school than it used to occupy. You can read five plays of Shakespeare with as little effort as you can read one play of Plautus. High-school students can go farther in English than they once could, and it is possible that in response to these conditions the high-school course of study in English has grown in matter and method so that it now overlaps the college course. Have the colleges found this out? Perhaps they have; it was news to me. I think it is worth studying and that it is a proper undertaking for the College Section of the English Council.

I have been made chairman of the College Section of the English Council for next year and made responsible for the program. I suggest with proper diffidence that this overlapping of the courses of study in English in college and high school be made the subject of investigation and discussion at the next annual meeting. I should like to hear opinions from college and high-school teachers of English throughout the country as to whether or not my judgments are correct and what modes of procedure should be followed in case they are.

There is a tendency for the curricula in English in the schools to be standardized throughout various areas. Particularly, there is a tendency

to standardize by the application of what are known as minimum essentials in English composition, grade by grade, through the grammar school and the high school. When colleges find out what the schools are doing—many colleges no doubt know well already—there will be a possibility of carrying the principle through one or two years of the college course and of reaching a general agreement which will enable colleges to do a more intelligent kind of teaching in the circumstances in which they find themselves. It may also be possible to ascertain and state definite and comprehensible objectives to be aimed at in various stages in the study of literature. This would of course require co-operation from the grade schools and the high schools.

Other suggestions of subjects proper for consideration by the College Section of the English Council will be welcome.

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ON (OR OF) PREPOSITIONS

Dorothy, a little friend of mine who is teaching her first year in a city high school, asked me to look over some Junior themes that she had been grading. "First, I want you to tell me if the subject-matter of the themes is 'live.' Miss S—, the head of the English Department, has demanded that all theme-subjects be 'live and timely,' so you see I have had my students write on current events. Second, I want to know if the construction of these themes, with my illuminating corrections and suggestions, is all right."

I found that the subject-matter was decidedly "live": "The League of Nations as a Political Force in American Politics," "The Fairness of Senator Borah's Criticism of the League," "The Justness of Clemenceau's Demands," "The Reasons for the Italian Claims." Truly, all of these subjects were not only "live," but timely and interesting. Several of them would be worthy subjects for a master's thesis in the field of political science. The footnotes were given; all quoted passages were so designated. On the whole, the subject-matter was O.K., considering the fact that the material had been gathered and organized by sixteen-year-old boys and girls. And so I could justly praise the subject-matter to Dorothy.

"Now tell me about the construction."

I saw that the proper nouns were coupled with well-behaved verbs, traveling in an harmonious company of melodic adverbs and tuneful adjectives; but the prepositions struck discordant notes, notes that